NCA

VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5718 APRIL 13, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

BANGLADESH: PRESIDENT ZIAUR PONDERS

ANNCR:

BANGLADESH PRESIDENT ZIAUR RAHMAN APPEARS TO BE KEEPING HIS OPTIONS OPEN ON THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THAT COUNTRY SHOULD HAVE A PRESIDENTIAL OR PARLIAMENTARY FORM OF GOVERNMENT. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

PRESIDENT ZIAUR BACK HOME FROM A FIVE-DAY STATE VISIT TO JAPAN, REAFFIRMED AN EARLIER PLEDGE TO HOLD PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN DECEMBER OF THIS YEAR. HE ALSO DECLARED THAT, IN HIS WORDS, PARLIAMENT WILL BE SOVEREIGN IN ITS FUNCTION, AND HE SAID OPEN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES WILL SOON BE PERMITTED IN BANGLADESH.

THESE ARE TWO OF THE MAIN DEMANDS RAISED BY THE COUNTRY'S VETERAN POLITICAL LEADERS AS A CONDITION FOR THEIR COOPERATION IN PRESIDENT ZIAUR'S PLANS FOR RETURNING BANGLADESH TO ELECTED RULE. HOWEVER, PRESIDENT ZIAUR WAS VAGUE ABOUT ANOTHER DEMAND OF THE POLITICIANS -- THAT IS REPEAL OF THE CONTROVERSIAL FOURTH AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION. THIS WAS THE AMENDMENT APPROVED DURING THE REGIME OF THE LATE MUJIBUR RAHMAN WHICH CONVERTED BANGLADESH TO A ONE-PARTY PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM AND IN EFFECT TURNED THE COUNTRY INTO A ONE-MAN DICTATORSHIP.

PRESIDENT ZIAUR TOLD REPORTERS THE QUESTION IS STILL UNDER STUDY. HE NOTED THAT SOME PEOPLE FAVOR REPEAL OF THE AMENDMENT, OTHERS SUGGESTED RETENTION, WHILE STILL A THIRD GROUP FAVORS RETENTION WITH SOME MODIFICATION. PRESIDENT ZIAUR ALSO INDICATED HE STILL FAVORS HOLDING ANEW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BEFORE THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, AND HE INDICATED HE WILL BE A CANDIDATE.

IN ANSWER TO OTHER QUESTIONS, THE BANGLADESH LEADER SAID HE HASN'T MADE UP HIS MIND YET WHETHER TO JOIN A NEW POLITICAL PARTY--THE NATIONALIST DEMOCRATIC FRONT--RECENTLY FORMED BY SOME OF HIS SUPPORTERS. BUT HE INDICATED SUCH A MOVE IS A POSSIBILITY. THE NEW PARTY, KNOWN LOCALLY AS JAJODAL, HAS COME OUT FOR A PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM ALONG FRENCH LINES, BUT HAS SUGGESTED THIS SHOULDN'T DETRACT FROM THE SOVEREIGNTY OF PARLIAMENT.

THUS A NEW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, IF ONE IS HELD, COULD IN EFFECT BECOME A PLEBICITE ON SUCH A SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY IF PRESIDENT ZIAUR JOINS THE NEW PARTY. PRESIDENT ZIAUR IS REGARDED AS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN TO WIN ANY NEW TEST, INASMUCH AS NO OTHER NATIONALLY KNOWN FIGURE HAS EMERGED TO CHALLENGE HIM IN POPULARITY.

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